

Baucus seeks screening for CARD

BY ROGER MORRIS

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U.S. Sen. Max Baucus reiterated his commitment Thursday to Libby, to local victims of asbestos-related disease, to the continued EPA cleanup and to economic development of the area.

During a meeting at Libby City Hall, Baucus also expressed support for a Libby-based research center but did say "the future of a clinical research center in Libby is undetermined at this point."

"My intention is to have it all here in Libby," the senator said at the end of a 2 1/2-hour meeting. "Some things might be better done in Missoula."

Earlier in the meeting Baucus mentioned the evolution of a research center in collaboration with the University of Montana similar to the biological center

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on Flathead Lake known as the Yellow Bay Research Center.

"Our number one goal is healthcare," said Dr. Brad Black, CARD director. "Our second goal is to keep CARD as an independent community entity to work for the community and drive research for the community."

Dave Forbes, dean of the U of M Pharmacy School, said the university "stands as a resource for the people of the state."

The university is into basic scientific research and not treating patients,

Forbes said.

"I support the need for clinical research," Forbes said. "We understand the problem, we want to be a resource to the state of Montana. We're not just the University of Missoula."

Baucus asked Forbes if he was going to take everything to Missoula?

"We stand as a resource to do research projects," Forbes said. "I pledge to help you (CARD) meet you're goals."

Black said he was excited about the university's involvement but said the CARD must remain an independent entity with broad-based research from across the country to benefit the Libby asbestos victims with results of that

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U.S. Sen. Max Baucus talks to Mike Leavitt, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services during a meeting in Libby on Thursday.

Baucus

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research, with local health care and economic development for the community.

Using a cell phone during the meeting with Libby, Baucus asked Mike Leavitt, the secretary of the federal Health and Human Services to look into transferring health screening responsibilities to the Libby CARD.

The telephone conversation was short.

"He did say he would look into it," Baucus said afterward. "And he did say to say hello to the good people of Libby."

Presently the state is conducting screening in Libby for

asbestos-related disease through MASSA (Montana Asbestos Screening and Surveillance Activity). The state program is funded by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

"We need to really work together," Baucus said. "What's our goal here? Take care of people, get the cleanup done and do research."

He said, "There're lots of different angles here but we've got to work together. That means keeping an open mind and listening to what other people say."

"If we're going to beat asbestos and the cleanup and economic development, we

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U.S. Sen. Max Baucus congratulates VFW members Larry Stroklund, Joe Kelly and Bob Barnes and turns over keys to a new bus for transporting veterans from Libby to the VA Hospital in Spokane. Baucus said his staff called around for a donation and the Ford Motor Co. responded quickly.

need to hang together."

Baucus opened the meeting saying three principles need to be adhered to: no politics, everything is on the table and "we're all in this together."

The senator said he wants to begin bi-monthly telephone

meetings with the Montana congressional delegation and Libby representatives to discuss various aspects of the asbestos problem so everyone works together.

He asked the community to talk among themselves to determine what is needed. Baucus recommended participants in

the phone calls include a representative from Gov. Brian Schweitzer's administration, Black, a county commissioner, and an EPA representative.

The first call will be Wednesday, March 2, to establish the group. The second call, a week later, will be on subject and issues.

"I needed everyone to think through what's needed," Baucus said.

"One thing that is really powerful here: Don't let somebody splinter off," Baucus said. "If you find somebody trying to splinter off, you cut him off at the knees. And don't let it get political."